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Winchester unveils new playgrounds at Leonard, McDonald fields

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Families check out the new play structures at Leonard Field. WINCHESTER NEWS STAFF PHOTO/XIYUE ERIC HAN

Dozens of children laughed and played at the brand-new playgro
Leonard and McDonald fields on a scorching summer afternoon.

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many, the school year had just ended, and the excitement of summer stretched ahead. These vibrant new play spaces offered kids the perfect spot to run, make friends, and enjoy the outdoors.

The grand opening and ribbon-cutting ceremonies took place on Monday, June 23. Both events drew an enthusiastic crowd, with Leonard Field's turnout especially impressive, with families packing the area to celebrate the new addition to their community.

"It was great to see the town finally re-do the old playgrounds," said Zachary Sun, a rising sophomore at Winchester High School. "I used to go to both Leonard and McDonald's as a kid and play on their playgrounds, it really was the highlight of my day."

Sun said he always wished the town would improve the old playgrounds because the play structures were small and old. Now improved, Sun said kids will be more likely to play here, enjoy nature, and connect with others.

The history of both fields stretch back a century. Leonard Field opened in 1921, and began as a baseball diamond before evolving into a multi-use recreation area. McDonald Field was established in 1925, and became a beloved baseball hub, hosting Winchester's historic 1955 Little League team that went to the semi-finals before losing to Pennsylvania.

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Select Board member Paras Bhayani, left, DPW Director Robert Labossiere, Select Board Vice Chair Anthea Brady, Town Manager Beth Rudolph and Select Board Chair Michelle Prior cut the ribbon on the new McDonald Field playground. WINCHESTER NEWS STAFF PHOTO/XIYUE ERIC HAN

Select Board Vice Chair Anthea Brady spearheaded the new improvements.

“These playgrounds have been in need of severe repairs for at least six years,” explained Brady. “With the ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) funding, we did a playground study that looked at all of our playgrounds.”

Brady said Leonard Field’s playground had a bridge that was hazardous, a climbing structure where the only way to get up was by climbing up a slide and at McDonald Field, there were various holes in the material.

There were various steps Winchester took to ensure both of the new play structures were safe and accessible and Brady pointed to Debra (Debbie) Johnson, a member of the Disability Access Commission (DAC) a
Winchester Parent Advisory Council (WinPAC) for more informa

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DAC is an organization in Winchester that protects the rights and facilitates the inclusion of individuals with disabilities in all aspects of community life within Winchester. WinPAC is a committee of parents and guardians working with educators for students who are on special education plans.

Johnson explained how the original plan for the Leonard Field playground had one big structure and a small one just for toddlers, with nothing in between.

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“The [new] design chosen is accessible for toddlers, but also something that someone who struggles with movements can use and enjoy,” Johnson said.

She pointed out features such as stairs, a transfer table for wheelchairs and various sensory aspects.

One of Johnson’s favorites was Global Motion, which is a rotating playground net. She explained that Global Motion allows a parent and a child to sit inside, a child to stand at the doorway, social play with other children, and sustained movement. At any time there could be up to a dozen kids in there.

A big part of the playground that provides accessibility and enjoyment is the various sensory aspects. Johnson explained how these details created an environment where children could explore, play, and connect in ways that suited their individual needs.

However, Johnson admitted these play structures are not perfect.

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“One big thing that is missing is that a playground that is truly ac
one that has ramps up to other levels,” Johnson said.

She added that for every inch that a ramp goes up in height, it must go a foot in length. For example, a 3-foot tall ramp would need to be 36 feet long. In addition, ramps need break platforms where people can rest so it would be more than just 36 feet.

Due to all of this, Johnson said a ramp would be a lot of money and take up a lot of space.

The official ribbon cutting of the new play structure at Leonard Field. WINCHESTER NEWS STAFF PHOTO/XIYUE ERIC HAN

Capital planning

Brady said the town voted in favor of the construction of both playgrounds through the capital process, or the way Winchester plans, reviews, and approves funding for large projects like buildings, parks, and pla
It involves proposal submission, committee reviews, budgeting, and a final

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vote at Town Meeting. In addition, Brady said the town secured $200,000 from Eversource.

Brady said she hoped the playgrounds would impact the community and pointed something out. While the playground was being built, she said the kids would be walking to school every day, wanting to play on it.

“There is going to be a lot of activity here over the summer, and there are also programs nearby that use the field and the playground,” continued Brady.

Winchester kids can now enjoy a brand new play structure at McDonald Field. WINCHESTER NEWS STAFF PHOTO/XIYUE ERIC HAN

In addition, Brady stressed the importance of high quality play structures.

“On days that are really hot like today, the kids are able to use th
test their limits, and play with their friends,” she said.

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In the future, Brady said there are already plans for a bathhouse and pavilion and potentially re-doing the basketball courts at Leonard Field. Around town, there's also a new playground going up at Lincoln Elementary School, another playground at Lynch Elementary School and resurfacing the playground at Vincent-Owen Elementary School.

The impacts of the playgrounds can already be felt.

Will Sullivan, a student at Muraco was delighted with the new playground. His favorite part is the new "ginormous slide." Sullivan used to come to the old playground at Leonard Field and he said this one is much better as it is bigger, way more fun, and has more ways for him and his friends to connect.

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